

# The Use of Cultural Anthropology and Sociology to Explain Work in Caribbean Societies

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**Abstract:** *Today people are linked together economically and socially by trade, investments and governance. These links are spurred by market liberalization and information communication and transportation technologies. Cyberspace communication and coordination are cheap, fast and global. What-ever their origins, electronic communications do not today represent a simple democratic project, but rather a corporate capitalist one. The very uneven World Wide Web might make us hesitant to embrace enthusiastically for it is a vanguard of global governance and democracy (Kollack 1999). We are in the Age of Electronic colonialization. Electronic colonialization is the dependency relationship established by the importation of communication hardware, foreign-produced software, along with related information protocols, that vicariously establish a set of foreign norms, values and expectations, which is intended to alter the regions' societies' culture and socialization processes. The electronic colonialism that we are experiencing is just as dreaded as mercantile colonialism of the nineteenth century. Mercantile colonialism economic focus was cheap labour. Electronic colonialism focused on how to cognitively manipulate the mind of the individual; it is aimed at influencing attitudes, beliefs and lifestyles geared at the consumerization of society.*

**Keywords:** The Caribbean, Cultural anthropology, Sociology, electronic colonialization, consumerization, governance.

## 1. Introduction

Work is an evolutionary process that has developed since the creation of man. Cultural anthropology has identified that as societies shifted from hunters and gatherers to agrarian and then to urban life, the social change occurred incrementally but inevitably. Paid work mirrored the economic trajectory of world capitalism. It cannot be disputed that there is an inherent symbiotic social relationship between worker and employer (capitalist). Throughout the capitalist world, employment in the form of work that appears the easiest to understand. In very simple terms, a worker brings his or her skills to the employer and in return receives a wage or salary for the time spent or the task achieved. However, it is not always that simple since it will be wrong to say that there is equality in the workplace.

According to Weber (1905) employment in modern society is a highly rationalized and bureaucratic process. Some workers have conditions of service agreements that give them the security of tenure. While there are others, who work for transnational corporations whose policies are to provide security and employment benefits for their workers. Yet, some workers work for some companies with very uncertain employment future whose main concern is to get the maximum return from labor at the minimum cost. Some employees work full-time, some part-time, whereas others are employed on a piecework basis in their own homes. The employee/worker enters into the employment agreement because social circumstances dictate no other way for him or her to gain a livelihood. The employer, on the other hand, owns the capital resources in the form of a business enterprise.

The capitalist world economy, envisioned by Wallerstein (2004), is a dynamic system that has changed over time.

However, certain basic features remain in place. Perhaps most important is that when one examines the dynamics of this system, we can identify that the core regions which are comprised of the United States of America and Northern European countries benefited the most from these arrangements. Through extremely high profits gained from international trade and exchange of manufactured goods for raw materials from the periphery in the form of technology transfer for oil and gas in Trinidad and Tobago. The core enriched itself at the expense of the peripheral economies. Wallerstein sees the development of the capitalist world economy (globalization) as detrimental to a large proportion of the world population.

### Work and Caribbean Societies

Caribbean societies are capitalist societies except for Cuba with a labor market that is the main institutional solution to a dual allocation problem that must be solved. Strategically, on one hand, the production system must be supplied with labor inputs it requires; on the other, labor-power must be provided with socioeconomic status in the form of income and social status that are vital for the means of subsistence. The labor market solves both of these allocative problems simultaneously. The important point is that the labor market organizes production and distribution as an exchange relationship between wages and labor, but markets, suppliers, and buyers of labor take an opposed position. The labor market like every other requires both sides to engage in continuous strategic adaptations. This forced adaptation arising from market relations can be viewed as a powerful source of the social processes of rationalization which are exclusively reflected in continuous productivity increases.

But it is obvious that in special processes of adaptation, which represents the dimension in which the supply side of the labor market can employ autonomous strategies against the demand side. Labour, therefore, has to make sacrifices.

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This becomes evident in the destruction of working-class families and social relations, but also the specific risk of marginalization. The Caribbean, job quality has deteriorated considerably as a result of increased income inequality. This is coupled with the increase in low-wage work and the constant fear of loss of a job, even among well-paid workers. Caribbean societies are Third World nation-states that depend on the economic strategies and policies of the First World societies. The combination of small size and external dependence has a significant impact on the economic development of the region. It is therefore in this context that one has to appreciate the relevance of the argument in this paper. Neo-colonialism is all about the transfer of surplus through debt and the flight of capital, in addition to the historical forms of profit repatriation and unequal exchange in international markets. The State has become the primary mechanism for the transfer of the surplus through debt payments.

**Caribbean Diaspora Migration and Work**

In many ways, the current generations of Caribbean migrants are simply doing what earlier generations have done for two centuries. Each successive generation of Caribbean people has travelled to nearby and distant locales. This has resulted in the formation of a successful migration tradition that characterizes the region today. In some of the smaller islands, human migration sustains the local economies which will otherwise have collapsed due to capitalist investment strategies which created local dislocations in incongruities in the region for many decades. These conditions which when combined with the region’s fragmented insularity have contributed to migration.

Migration and diaspora are intimately related because of their economic survival. According to Sheffer (1986), the modern diaspora is "ethnic minority groups of migrant origins, residing and acting in the host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin or their homelands."

Stalker (2003) identified that the Caribbean has one of the largest diasporic communities in the world. This argument is supported by Hosein, Franklin & Joseph (2010) "the diaspora has a large amount of untapped potential with regards to economic development in the region."

According to (Addy 2002; Orozio 2003; Petterson 2000, & Nurse 1999) the issue of migration and development is one of the remittances. Workers’ remittances are associated with the proliferation of transnational networks, the erosion of national state sovereignty, and the emergence of transnational communities and hybrid cultural identities.

**Table 1: Remittances to the Caribbean 2002**

Country	Remittances
Barbados	84
Cuba	1138
Dominican Republic	2111
Guyana	119
Haiti	931
Jamaica	1288
Trinidad and Tobago	59
Total	5730

The number of highly educated migrants from the developing countries living in the OECD doubled between 1990 and 2000 (Docquier and Marfouk 2005) and have continued to grow over the past decade as developed countries have increasingly made their immigration criteria more skill selective,

The Caribbean’s share of the total migration with tertiary education ranged from 20% in the Dominican Republic to as much as 46% in Trinidad and Tobago. According to Carrington and Detragiache (1998), the brain drain from the Caribbean is the highest in the world so that the migration rate among the well-educated is high. In Guyana, the migration rate among the well-educated is estimated at 77%. Other English-speaking countries like Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago also have migration rates over 50%.

**Table 2: Caribbean Brain Drain 1990**

Countries	Tertiary Education share of Total Migrants	Migration rates of Tertiary Education
Dominican Republic	22.6	14.2
Jamaica	41.7	67.3
Trinidad and Tobago	46.7	57.2
Guyana	40.7	77.3

Source: Carrington and Detragiache 1998.

**Transformation of Work in Society**

The International Labour Organization has identified communication technologies as a process of growing interdependence between all people of the world. Today people are linked together economically and socially by trade, investments, and governance. These links are spurred by market liberalization and information communication and transportation technologies. Cyberspace communication and coordination are cheap, fast, and global. Whatever their origins, electronic communications do not today represent a simple democratic project, but rather a corporate capitalist one. We are witnessing the fourth industrial revolution which is based on improvements and development to technologies associated with the paradigm shift of the industrial revolution. We are today witnessing what Arnold et al. (2016) called the digitalization and automation of manufacturing processes that are accompanied by improvement of the technological innovations. From the 1990s, neoliberalism has identified the economic benefits of micro-electronics. Bresnahan and Trajtenberg (1992) characterized micro-electronics as a general-purpose technology that affects all sectors of the economic process.

The very uneven World Wide Web might make us hesitant to embrace enthusiastically for it is a vanguard of global governance and democracy (Kollack 1999). We are in the Age of Electronic colonialization. Electronic colonialization is the dependency relationship established by the importation of communication hardware, foreign-produced software, along with related information protocols that vicariously establish a set of foreign norms, values, and expectations that are intended to alter the regions’ culture and socialization processes. The electronic colonialism that we are experiencing is just as dreaded as the mercantile colonialism of the nineteenth century. Mercantile colonialism's economic focus was cheap labor. Electronic colonialism focuses on how to cognitively manipulate the

mind of the individual; it is aimed at influencing attitudes, beliefs, and lifestyles geared at the consumerization of society. This is evident according to Eijaz and Ahmad-Eijaz (2011) on the continued reliance of developing countries for getting information that will only facilitate electronic colonialism and further imperial relationships based on the geopolitical web. Electronic colonialism is aimed at examining the mental images, and the long-term consequences of exposure to imported software.

### **Work and Digitalization of Society**

The capitalist world is experiencing its fourth industrial revolution, the digitalization of technologies. Societies are all going through a period of accelerated automation characterized by the introduction of robots and artificial intelligence into our workplaces. It is important to understand that the paradigm shift that took place after WW II in the automobile industry and from the 1970s and 1980s, welding shops in the automobile industry were completely automated.

Labour sociology has identified that accelerated technological change is a well-known phenomenon in the manufacturing and service industries. According to Nobel (1986), revolutionizing the productive forces is a constant imperative of capital. Take, for instance, the creation of digital infrastructures also called platform economy (Amazon, Facebook, Google, and eBay) that enable a wide range of activities.

Rochet and Tirole (2006) elucidated that digitalization has increased the fluidity of markets and the ease of entry it has also dramatically increased society's dependency on global digital platforms. These digital platforms enable direct interaction between producers and consumers. Digitalization is changing the labour process in organizations. The platform economy and crowd-work represent a change in how work is organized. According to Naderi, B. (2018), crowd-workers are the key components and the main drive of the crowdsourcing micro-tasks platforms.

From a neoliberal perspective viewpoint, this technique is facilitated by transnational corporations' global governance policies that prompted a reorganization process of markets, value creation and value capture and inevitably a reorganization of work. According to Kenney and Zysman (2016); Langley and Leyshon (2016), this new development has been facilitated by new information and communication technologies and in particular by the movement of computable algorithms.

The rapid development and adoption of robotics and intelligent systems with self-learning algorithms are automating not only tasks associated with blue-collar work but also less-routine tasks that have been considered knowledge-intensive (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2012; Ford 2015). According to Wolter et al 2015, jobs in information technology and education are likely to benefit, whereas jobs in manufacturing industries where the use of machines and technical equipment is widespread will probably be hardest hit by staffing cuts.

### **Work in a Neoliberal Global Economy**

The proponents of neoliberalism claim that people are best served by market freedom and little intervention by the state. The role of government should be confined to creating and defending markets (World Bank 1993). All other functions are better discharged by private enterprise, which will be prompted by the profit motive to supply goods and services. Adam Smith in his book *The Wealth of the Nations* (1776) argues that if people rationally pursue their economic interests in free markets, they will exhaust all mutually beneficial opportunities to produce goods and exchange with one another.

According to Adam Smith such exhaustion of opportunities for mutually beneficial trade results in full employment. Some workers will be unemployed because they are in a temporary search for another job or they insist on higher pay. In the classical liberal economic model both factors of production, for example, labour and capital needed to be mobile to achieve higher efficiency and growth. The current global economics and neoliberalism drive, despite some mobility in the high skilled labour force, labour mobility is highly restricted between nations, while capital mobility has increased enormously.

Today, there is a dramatic shrinking of the distance between places, growing global interconnectivity of economies, and the increasing importance of transnational corporations and the impact this is having on workers and workplaces. This process is mitigated by the speed with which the consequences in which the economic and political events are transmitted through market strategies.

Researchers like Fourcade and Healy (2007) have argued that neoliberalism unrestricted markets are the most efficient mechanism possible for allocating resources and optimizing outcomes for national economies and individual workers. The approach to work as we know it is being revolutionized. Kochan and Osterman (1994) highlighted that neoliberal work organizations are aimed at replacing political accommodations between organization stakeholders and job entitlement by market determination of wages and benefits. The process identified is rationalization at its very best. Employers' eyes are always focused on profits by regulating production, elimination of waste, and the effective use of resources. Workers are subjected to what Davis (2009) called the frequency of reorganization, strict task regiments, and electronic surveillance.

According to Ganesh and Inkson (2010) workers are today faced with the movement toward 'boundary-less-careers' in which workers are expected to develop ongoing skill sets that allow them to identify employment opportunities as the economy changes. The Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro-Enterprise Development has identified the neoliberal trajectory by encouraging workers to see themselves as entrepreneurs and to regard employment as a chance to develop skills that will enhance their marketability.

### **Work and Aging in the Caribbean Region**

The Caribbean, like many parts of the world, is witnessing an increase in the population among the elderly. The demographic transition and the implications anticipated an

expanded elderly population worldwide since the aging of the world's population had been predicted as the most certain reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This aging is in large part a function of declining and low fertility levels. One of the outcomes of the declining mortality, fertility, and migration of working-age persons that the region has witnessed is an increase in the relative share of the total by the older age groups of which it is comprised.

The population 60 years and over, has now grown so large that unlike in the past, their concerns and those of their families can no longer be ignored. According to Eldermire-Shearer (1997), not only has the population aged but the group over 80 years and older is the fastest-growing group.

**Table 3:** Total Population 60 years and over in four Caribbean countries

Country	Males	Females
Barbados	17,770	24,485
Grenada	5,770	7,373
Guyana	27,976	32,566
Trinidad and Tobago	64,379	76,497

Source: Caribbean Epidemiological Centre (CAREC) 2010

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO 2008), identified Barbados as having 10% of its population 85 years and older. Brown (2002) cited that low dependency and a relatively high proportion of the population in the economically active age groups are probably the demographic basis of its high per capita income and economic prosperity.

The United Nations defines older persons as those persons in the population aged 60 years and over. However, the distinction is made between the younger elderly 60-70 and the older elderly aged 75 years and older. According to Cooper, C.L; Goswami, U; Sahakian, B.J. (2009) in almost all countries of the world people are living longer on average and are remaining healthy and capable to a later age. Most of today's 65-year-olds will live beyond 80, and some will live beyond 110 placing a significant extra load on pension schemes and the social security system.

**Work, Occupational Health and Safety**

Workers expect a safe working environment as their fundamental right. Yet, in the Caribbean, there are still poor working conditions due to the lack of practicing simple preventive measures. The standard of Occupational health and safety available to workers is the main determinant of their health. The successive industrial revolutions associated with capitalist society were accompanied by traditional as well as complex work settings due to the paradigmatic shift of technological advancement which is accompanied by a wide variety of chemical, physical and psychological hazards in the production process. Occupational health issues affect individuals, families, and communities, as well as the world. All stakeholders have responsibilities to embrace medical, engineering, and legislative interventions to make the work environment safer.

Generally, workers' health is not focused on educational curricula and poorly represented in non-health policies due to the low level of awareness among policymakers including

the general public. The Global Plan of Action of Workers' Health (2008-2017) developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) seeks to address all determinants of workers' health, disease and injury, social and individual factors, and access to health services.

The work environment today consists of a triad of the environment, man, and machine which is associated with risk factors that have the potential to harm the health, safety, and welfare of workers. Occupational hazards may produce immediate or delayed symptoms depending upon the duration of exposure, the intensity of exposure, and the individual's susceptibility. Industrial workers are exposed to a multitude of hazards from physical, biological, mechanical, chemical, psycho-social and ergonomic issues that adversely affect workers, co-workers as well as the organization. The majority of workers are illiterate and ignorant about the protective measures for the job.

For the period 2006-2015 the sector with the highest number of fatal accidents was the construction sector while the manufacturing sector non-fatal accidents were the lowest at 289 in 2014 and the highest 555 in 2008. These accidents and incidents are to a large measure due to the failure and deficiency in the policy and management of occupational health and safety in several businesses in the country (Data for the manufacturing and construction were extracted from appendix 4 of the Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago 2015-2016 report).

**Table 4:** Manufacturing Industry: Fatal and Non-Fatal Accidents 2006-2015

Year	Fatal	Non-Fatal
2006	1	257
2007	1	407
2008	0	555
2009	5	385
2010	0	373
2011	1	303
2012	1	Blank
2013	0	Blank
2014	1	289
2015	2	331
Industrial Accident Registrar	Research Planning Unit	Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (2016)

**Table 5:** Construction Industry: Fatal and Non-Fatal Accidents 2006-2015

Year	Fatal	Non-Fatal
2006	2	10
2007	4	43
2008	1	79
2009	5	96
2010	0	53
2011	2	63
2012	4	43
2013	4	Blank
2014	7	40
2015	4	33
Industrial Accident Registrar	Research Planning Unit	Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (2016)



All stakeholders including the government, the employer, and the worker need to adopt a systematic approach of identification and assessment of the risk by collecting maximum information to implement a solution to the risk. Employers must provide leadership for Occupational Health and Safety activities. Attaining Occupational Health and Safety knowledge, attitude, and skills should be encouraged among employees. The involvement and meaningful participation of employees in the implementation and maintenance of Occupational Health and Safety services is fundamental to make it effective and acceptable.

## 2. Conclusion

This paper has shown that work is an evolutionary process created by man as part of his survival mechanism. The pace of change has been increasing exponentially and the information technology revolution has transformed work for most of us in less than a generation. Attitudes and behaviors tend to adjust more slowly than the technological advances especially in Developing countries such as the Caribbean nations.

While remnants of the independence movement persist in the Caribbean region, by and large, there appears to be a resignation to the colonial status because of the welfare payments that sustain the majority of the people, as well as the negative demonstrative effect of the economic failures. In the Caribbean region, there appears to be a reversal of colonialism in the form of neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism through the aegis of multinational corporations and global governance.

This conclusion is based on the fact that there is a continued reliance of the Caribbean region for getting information that will facilitate electronic colonialism and further imperial relationships based on the geopolitical web. The Caribbean is in a very precarious position in this fourth industrial revolution environment, an environment of electronic colonialization where a dependency relationship is established by the importation of communication hardware, foreign-produced software along with the related information protocols that vicariously established a set of foreign norms, values, and expectations which is intended to alter the region's culture and socialization processes.

According to Patnaik (2006), technological progress in the form of new products and processes in Developed countries is associated with an increase in labor productivity. With trade liberalization, labor productivity is exogenously driven than before the period of liberalization which resulted in increased product output and employment growth. These factors encourage an increase in capital intensive technology, which will certainly contribute towards stagnation in employment in organized sectors, which means as production growth in the sector accelerates jobs are not simultaneously created in developing countries; resulting in a phenomenon that Chandrasekhar (2010) called "jobless growth."

Caribbean societies because of their cultural, political, and economic socialization are always prone to the phenomenon of "brain drain" which is identified to be the highest in the

world. In the Caribbean, migration goes hand in hand with diaspora and remittances. The well-educated and skilled group of migrants are the ones who are in high demand in developed societies.

The migration-remittances nexus remains a powerful dimension of small island societal change and sustenance. According to Klak 1998; Watson 1995) the nature of the macro-structural 'global shifts' underway today poses alarming threats to small states in peripheral regions like the Caribbean.

Remittances have emerged as the fastest growing and most stable source of capital flows and foreign exchange in the last decade. However, remittances are private flows and are not fixed and therefore do not directly contribute to government revenue. According to Lipietz (1992), a process of "Brazilianization" is created in which a large army of peripheral workers service the needs and desires of the wealthy few.

Occupational health and safety have identified the need for a systematic approach to the study of hazards or risk factors at the workplace level but there are issues for the Caribbean region such as non-affordability, lack of infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers in the implementation of health strategies because of associated scarce resources.

Finally, there is hope. Neoliberal rhetoric has suggested that in the free market, the comparative advantages supposedly enjoyed by the Developed countries in the form of brainpower and technology and the Developing countries with its cheap labor will result in a new international division of labor. But, from a pedagogical point of view, it is very important to educate present and future workers about current neoliberal and transnational market trends in such a way that Caribbean people understand how globalization is reshaping national economies and labour markets.

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